

Letter from H.P. Sprague, May 24, 1862

Camp advance on to Richmond Near the Chickahimeny [Chickahominy] river May the 24th
1862

Dear Cousin,

I take the present opportunity to write a few lines to you to let you know that I am well at present and hope that these few lines may find you and your family all the Same. It was my intention to have written to you Several Days ago but we had an order to go on picket which prevented me from writing at the time. I intended to but perhaps It was best that I did not as I had an oppertunity of gathering Several items which may prove interesting to you. We were Sent on picket Some five miles in advance of our Division on the road leading to Long Bridge across the Chicohomeny [Chickahominy] on the left of the main road leading to Richmond the telegraph road as it is Mostly Called. The Country here is the most beautiful that I have Saw in VA. The farms here where they are Cultivated are rich the Soil is of a Sandy Nature and Can be by Cultivation be made to produce the most abundant Crops yet. There is a great many farms in this part of the Country as in other portions of Va that lays at Commons on which a rank growth bushes is now growing up. It Seems to be the business of those that Cultivate the Soil here in this Country to Clear a peice of land and use it a few years and then abandon it and let it grow up again to Such Vegetation as nature may See fit to produce. There is forests here [whose?] trees are now growing that you Can trace the furrows where there has been Corn planted. There Sistem of planting here being to throw two furrows together and planting on top of the furrow and in Cultivating it they plow it but the one way that being the Same way it is first plowed formes a high ridge. And those furrows are now Seen in woods where the land has not been Cultivated for the last fifty or Seventy five years.

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We were posted on picket handy to a house in Which I Suspose once Dwelt Ex-president Tyler as Close by is a grave yard about four rods Square intended I Suspose for a family burying ground in Which is buried his wife and Several Children including the rev. Henry Mayville Dennison who was married to a Dauter of Tylers. He was born near Wilksberee in Allegheney Co Pa, Educated at the St George College and was pastor of Several of the largest Churches in the South. He died in /57. His wife is also buried here and Several other Distinguist Characters. I read the inscriptions on all of the grave or toom Stones Some of them being of great lenght both prose and in poetry. I had no paper along or I would have written Down Some of them and Sent them home.

The country here as in other parts we have passed through bears the marks of the Desolating influences of War. The rebels have burned all of the fences along the Course of their incampments in their Comeing to Yorktown and their retreat from that place leaving Exposed Some of the most beautiful grain fields to the [pu[b]lick?] but these fields afford very good pastureage for our horses and beef Cattle. Some of these fields that are less Exposed to roads then others is now Shooting in head and looks beautiful. There has been a great Deal of fall grain Sown here for the purpose of keeping there army, More than there Ever was before. There is Some fields that I have Seen with a hundred fifty acre in But alas they are gone and left them I think never to return them again. So it will not benefit them any more than it has all ready Done.

There is Some very nice houses in this County bu[i]lt on the old Va Stile Chimneys on the out Side. There is but very few brick houses and where you See one it is painted or plastered over with a kind of white Cement and Chimeys left the natural Colour of the bricks which gives them all the Same ap[p]ea[r]ance. They houses is in most Cases left te[n]antless with the Exception of a few Darkies left to take Care of there massa Deal pro[p]erty which they are Doing greatly to the benefit of the Union Soldiers. They are mostly ignorant and you Can buy as much from them with a three cent piece as you can With a Dime. But sometimes we meet a medling intelegent Darkey from which there can

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be a great Deal of information Concerning the Doings in this County which has at last Caused this unhappy rebellion. There is one and while a place where there is a white Citizen ventured to Stay and risk being killed by the Union Soldiers Which the rebels told them we would do and they have been happily Disappointed. But to Close my Scribbling on this Subject and give you What war new there is.

After Comeing in of picket Duty we had orders to march on towards Richmond which the boys took very hard after Standing out on picket all night. Marching five miles to Camp and then haveing to pack up and Start on a forward movement did not g[o] down so Easy but it is all Same. Go we must wether we like it or not. We march about three miles that night which took us from three until ten OClock Which will give you Some Idea of how fast an army is moved after a retreating Enemy. We laid on the ground untill morning When we moved about a mile to our present Camp and we do not know how Soon we will Start from here. It has been wet to day and quite Cold. We have had Some very warm weather here almost as warm as mid Sumer there.

It is thought by Some that the rebels will Evacuate Richmond and not fight But I think that there will be a big fight Somewhere near that place. And the Oppinion is that the war will Soon be over but I think it will be longer that we will Stay in the Service our three years. If over so soon why does the president Call out fifty thousand more troops? We must look at things as they are not as rumer and Every body talk makes them. The report is here now that McClellens [McClellan's] head quarters is in Richmond. He has Sent word for the generals to hurry up their different Commands. If he is in Richmond why do we every now and then hear Skirmeshing between our advance and there rear guard and still those reports are told by men high in Command. My opinion is that we will all Serve out our three years that is if not discharged in Some other way Sooner. There is one of two things this rebellion will End very Sudenly or Continue for Some time to come.

I will close my Scribbling for this time. You must Excuse all mistakes in writting and composition for it a poor place here to do Either. Tell Jane to write often to me. I will write

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again when I receive a letter from her and not sooner unless Something of importance takes place. Tell her to Send me a dollars wort of postage Stamps when She gets the money I Sent her and I will Send a doller in return. She can get them in Brookville if not nearrer home. We are So far into Va now and on the move allmost Continually that I can not procure them here with out a great Deal of risk. Give my best respects to all and Except the Same for yourself. I Ever remain your affectionate Cousin. Good by from

H.P. Sprague